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AUTHOR Donlan, Dan
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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines five methods of research on sex bias in the classroom: one-time survey, one class/one treatment, two class/two treatment, one class/random assignment to treatment, and analysis of differentiated effect. It shows how each method could be used in attempting to measure the effect of a unit on Norma Klein's "Mom, the Wolfman and Me"; gives hypothetical results, as if each method had been used; and indicates how these results might be interpreted. The paper concludes by noting that the study of sexism, inherent in language and literature, should be a vital part of the English curriculum. (TJ)

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RESEARCHING SEX BIAS IN THE CLASSROOM

Dan Donlan
Associate Professor of Education
University of California
Riverside, California 92502

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Researching Sex Bias in the Classroom

> Fade out: Mrs. Olson. Fade in Dr. Henry Cutright, as he enters his fashionable office at Ocean City Memorial Hospital. He is greated by two ladies--Lydia Brinthrop, his chic private secretary, and Mary Margaret Muldune, long time chief nurse at Ocean Memorial. Dr. Cutright has been on leave of absence, recovering from the untimely death of his second wife Iris, killed when the ambulance in which she was riding, along with her secret lover Attorney Austin Ridgley (allegedly dying of a tropical skin disease) crashed into the charged wire gates of Professor Hugo Pierhoffer's gothic estate at the edge of town. Ridgley, now cured of the rash but now a hopeless amnesiac, has forgotten everything he has learned about law and has decided, against the wishes of his doting housekeeper, Nellie O'Floozy (in actuality his mother) to enter the medical profession as a psychiatrist. Nellie, afraid that if Ridgley enters medicine at Ocean Memorial, he may discover that Nurse Muldune is his first wife, whom Ridgley believes is also dead, but who, in reality, has received plastic surgery . . .

As Alice L. Muir (1976) points out, casting a play, in this case a soap opera, is an enjoyable way of assessing sex role attitudes in the classroom. Note the above example. The men--Henry Cutright, Austin Ridgley, and Hugo Pierhoffer--occupy prestigious positions in Ocean City; whereas the women--Mary Margaret Muldune, Lydia Brinthrop, Iris, and Nellie O'Floozy--occupy relatively subservient positions. The graduate student who composed the Ocean City saga, though creative, ran the risk of being labeled as sexist as his female counterpart, who cast the doctor, lawyer, and professor as women, and the nurse, secretary, and housekeeper as men.

The soap opera scripts were responses to an entry level test I administered in a course entitled "Sexism in Reading and Language Programs." Students, mostly women, were surprised how automatically they cast doctors, lawyers, college professors as men--secretaries, nurses, and housekeepers as

women. Perhaps we can blame the television soap operas. But then, what about Dr. Laura Horton on Days of Our Lives, Dr. Maggie Powers on The Doctors, and master architect Gwen Frame, on Another World?

Convinced they were all sexist, the students, for the most part experienced teachers, embarked on the course's three objectives: (1) to review the professional literature on sexism, (2) to develop classroom materials that focus on sex role stereotyping, and (3) to field test these materials using some form of research design. The third objective--research--created the most concern. However, the combined efforts of Responses to Sexism (Clapp, 1976), Sexism and Language (Nilsen and others, 1977) and Campbell and Stanley (1963) produced five research designs for teachers wishing to engage in research in their own classrooms: the one-time survey, the one class-one treatment experiment, the two class-two treatment experiment, the one class-random assignment to treatment experiment, and analysis of differentiated effect. For economy, all the suggested research will focus on attempts to measure the effect of a unit on Mom, the Wolfman and Me, and the data will be fictitious, yet realistic.

One-Time Survey

Unlike the research laboratory, the classroom precludes most scientifically controlled research: children are unpredictable as are many features of classroom environment. For this reason, the one-time survey is effective because distraction and interference are minimized. Consider the following "values clarification" exercise one teacher administered prior to teaching Norma Klein's Mom, the Wolfman and Me, a book that defies certain sex role stereotypes.

Figure 1. Sample One-Time Survey Administered Before Students Read Mom, the Wolfman, and Me

Ideal Qualities

Instructions: Rank order the following characteristics according to importance for (1) the ideal female and (2) the ideal male.

Characteristic	*Rank for Female	*Rank for Male
generosity		
gentleness		
physical attractiveness		
humor		
athletic ability		
mechanical ability		
friendliness		
consideration		
intelligence		

*Use numbers 9 through 1, high through low.

After students have filled out the survey, the data can be compiled in various ways. First a class average for each trait, female rank and male rank, will indicate a values profile for those about to read Mom:

Figure 2. Class Averages for Selected Traits from Sample One-Time Survey

Characteristic	Average Rank for Female	Average Rank for Male
generosity	2.6	5.1
gentleness	6.9	2.4
physical attractiveness	8.6	6.2

The data above suggest that this group of students approaches Mom with some fairly traditional attitudes toward sex differences.

Second, the surveys that male students submit can be separated from the surveys that female students submit; the resulting data can be reported separately and comparatively:

Figure 3. Class Averages for Selected Traits from Sample One-Time Survey, Separated by Sex of Students

Characteristic	Average Rank for Female		Average Rank for Male	
	By Males	By Females	By Males	By Females
generosity	5.2	1.1	3.2	6.9
gentleness	8.1	5.9	1.3	3.6
physical attractiveness	8.8	8.4	8.8	3.7

These data, more sensitive than those in Figure 2, indicate that the males and females in the class come to Mom with, in most cases, differing sex role expectations.

Consequently, data from attitude surveys on sex role stereotyping tell more when subdivided according to the sex of the respondent.

One-Class/One-Treatment

The one-time survey is limited. It can measure only the attitude environment at one given point in time. Though useful as diagnosis, it reveals little about the effectiveness of teaching and learning. A one-class/one-treatment strategy reveals more.

Using this design, a teacher can see if Mom, the Wolfman, and Me would have any effect on changing student attitudes toward sex roles. Before the novel is taught, an attitude inventory can be administered; after the novel is taught, the same attitude inventory is re-administered. Results from the first inventory are compared to those from the second inventory. Any changes could be, then, attributed to the quality of instruction.

Consider, first, a partial attitude inventory:

Figure 4. (Partial) Attitude Inventory, Administered Before and After Students are Taught Mom, the Wolfman, and Me

Instructions: Read each of the following statements. If you agree with the statement, circle A. If you are undecided, circle U. If you disagree with the statement, circle D.

1.	A woman's place is in the home.	A	U	D				
2.	A woman should work, if she wants to, even if she doesn't need the money.				A	U	D	
3.	Children need the guidance of both parents.	A	U	D				
4.	A father can effectively rear his children alone.				A	U	D	
5.	Fathers have different styles of disciplining their children from mothers.	A	U	D				
6.	With respect to disciplining children, there are more similarities among fathers as compared to mothers than there are differences between them.				A	U	D	
7.	Caring for children is basically the job of the mother.	A	U	D				
8.	Fathers should take a large part in caring for children.				A	U	D	
9.	Children tend to develop closer friendships with their mothers.	A	U	D				
10.	Children develop friendships with their parents in much the same way as they do with children their own age.				A	U	D	

Note that the statements are almost paired opposites. So, if a student agrees with an odd-numbered statement, that student might disagree with the even-numbered statement with which it is paired (this could be a check on consistency of attitude). By assigning number credit to each attitude, a total numerical score for each student can be reached:

Figure 5. Scoring Guide for (Partial) Attitude Inventory

	A	U	D	A	U	D
1. A woman's place is in the home.	1	2	3			
2. A woman should work, if she wants to, even if she doesn't need the money.				3	2	1
3. Children need the guidance of both parents.	1	2	3			
4. A father can effectively rear his children alone.				3	2	1
. . . etc.						

Pre-test scores can, then, be compared with post-test scores:

Figure 6. Pre-test and Post-test Scores on Attitude Inventory for a Hypothetical Class

Student	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Difference
Suzie	25	36	11
Bill	14	38	24
Jose	19	21	2
Angela	38	27	-11
Sara	31	36	5
Dave	20	15	- 5
		Total Growth	26
		Average Growth	4.3

The data suggest that Mom, the Wolfman, and Me tended to change students' attitudes. Subdivided by sex, the data could show whether female or male students were more changed by the book:

Figure 7. Pre-test and Post-test Scores on Attitude Inventory for a Hypothetical Class, Separated According to Sex of Student

Male Students

Name	Pre	Post	Dif
Bill	14	38	24
Jose	19	21	2
Dave	20	15	-5
	Total Growth		19
	Average Growth		6.3

Female Students

Name	Pre	Post	Dif
Suzie	35	36	11
Angela	38	27	-11
Sara	31	36	5
	Total Growth		5
	Average Growth		1.7

Two-Class/Two-Treatment

Although a lot of information can be gained from the one-class/one-treatment design, it is somewhat limiting. For instance, a marked change of attitude might have occurred for some reason other than Mom. To see if the book made a difference, a teacher might want to compare attitude inventory scores from two classes--one class reading Mom, one class reading another book, preferably one that doesn't advocate similar attitudes, say, The Old Man and the Sea. Contrastive data might look something like this:

Figure 8. Data from Two Classes Taking Inventory

Class One
(Mom)

Name	Pre	Post	Growth
Suzie	25	36	11
Angela	38	27	-11
Sara	31	36	5
		Female Total	5
		Female Average	1.7
Bill	14	38	24
Jose	19	21	2
Dave	20	15	-5
		Male Total	19
		Male Average	6.3
		Female and Male Total	26
		Female and Male Avg.	4.3

Class Two
(Old Man)

Name	Pre	Post	Growth
Mary	25	27	2
Sochi	38	37	-1
Audry	29	29	0
		Female Total	1
		Female Average	0.3
Tyler	14	16	2
Ray	19	17	-2
Joe	20	21	1
		Male Total	1
		Male Average	0.3
		Female and Male Total	2
		Female and Male Avg.	0.3

One-Class/Random Assignment to Treatment

The two-class/two-treatment design will provide comparative data about changes in sex role attitudes, showing that one group of students (in the above case, the group reading Mom) had a greater attitude change than did another group (in the above case, the group reading Old Man). Comparing one class with another is useful as long as the students in both classes have similar characteristics. What if, for instance, the students in Class Two were two years younger than those in Class One, or one track higher, or had all read Sheila Schwartz' Like Mom, Like Me one month before? Comparative data, then, would be insignificant. To guard against invalid comparisons, a teacher can randomly assign students to two teaching strategies within the same class.

Random assignment can be accomplished easily. Using the roll book, a teacher can place odd numbered students in one group (A) and even numbered students in another group (B). Then, as a check to see whether the groups are equal, standardized reading scores or course grades can be used:

Figure 9. Roll Sheet for a Hypothetical Junior High School English Class

			Reading	Grade Average
A	1.	Andrews, Betty	10.1	A
B	2.	Buck, George	4.3	D
A	3.	Clark, Ben	7.1	C
B	4.	Corcoran, Lydia	9.3	A
A	5.	Domkin, Verus	8.3	B
B	6.	Everhardt, Lisa	9.6	D
A	7.	Fairmont, Lois	7.3	C
B	8.	Grigmont, Howard	11.2	A
A	9.	Putnam, Carl	9.6	B
B	10.	Ramonda, Hector	10.2	B
A	41.	Ziploc, Petula	9.6	D
B	42.	Abacrombee, Petra	7.6	B

The resultant randomized groups would look like Figure 9A.

Figure 9A.

Group A (reads Mom, the Wolfman, and Me)

		Reading	Grade Average
1.	Andrews, Betty	10.1	A
3.	Clark, Ben	7.1	C
5.	Domkin, Verus	8.3	B
7.	Fairmont, Lois	7.3	C
9.	Putnam, Carl	9.6	B
41.	Ziploc, Petula	9.6	D
	Average	8.7	C

Group B (reads Old Man and the Sea)

2.	Buck, George	4.3	D
4.	Corcoran, Lydia	9.3	A
6.	Everhardt, Lisa	9.6	D
8.	Grigmont, Howard	11.2	A
10.	Ramonda, Hector	10.2	B
42.	Abacrombee, Petra	7.2	B
	Average	8.7	C+

In effect, the class is divided into two equal parts. Since the two parts of the class are equal, only the post-test attutude inventory need be given. Results might arrange themselves like this:

Figure 10. Results from Two Randomized Groups Taking Post-Test Only Attitude Inventory

Group A (Mom)		Group B (Old Man)	
Student	Score	Student	Score
Andrews	36	Buck	40
Clark	38	Corcoran	19
Domkin	21	Everhardt	22
Fairmont	27	Grigmont	17
Putnam	36	Ramonda	23
Ziploc	15	Abacrombee	14
Average	29	Average	22.5

The hypothetical data in Figure 10 indicates that "better" attitudes toward sex role stereotyping were achieved by students reading Mom, the Wolfman, and Me; in effect, the book did make a difference.

Differentiated Effect

Additional information about the impact of Mom can be gained by looking at different types of students. For instance, comparing the scores of female students with male students, or high readers with low readers. Here are some ways of looking at differentiated effect:

Figure 11. Results from the Randomized Groups Taking Post-Test Only Attitude Inventory, According to Sex

Group A (Mom)				Group B (Old Man)			
Females		Males		Females		Males	
Betty	36	Ben	38	Lydia	19	George	40
Lois	27	Verus	21	Lisa	22	Howard	17
Petula	15	Carl	36	Petra	14	Hector	23
Avg.	23	Avg.	31.7	Avg.	18.3	Avg.	23.7

Figure 12. Results from the Randomized Groups Taking Post-Test Only Attitude Inventory, According to High Readers/Low Readers

Group A (Mom)				Group B (Old Man)			
High Readers		Low Readers		High Readers		Low Readers	
Betty	36	Ben	38	Lisa	22	George	40
Carl	36	Verus	21	Howard	17	Lydia	19
Petula	15	Lois	27	Hector	23	Petra	14
Avg.	29	Avg.	28.7	Avg.	20.7	Avg.	24.3

With regard to differentiated effect, Figure 11 indicates that Mom did improve the attitudes of both the male students and the female students who read it, and that it had a slightly stronger impact on males than on females. Figure 12

indicates that the book had a slightly stronger impact on high readers than it did on low readers.

Why Do Research At All?

Doing good research in the classroom is time-consuming, but it can provide abundant information about the effectiveness of teaching and curriculum--plus it's fun if you include the students in gathering and processing data. The one-time survey is useful as a "snapshot" of attitudes and values existing at a moment in time. It is useful in predicting how students will accept a new body of learning. The one-class/one-treatment, particularly with its pre- and post-test, measures possible changes in student behavior as a result of teaching. The two-class/two-treatment compares the performance of students receiving two types of instruction. Random assignment determines, through its equal groups, whether teaching does, in fact, make a difference. Finally, differentiated effects indicate that teaching may have different kinds of effects on different types of students.

Research in sex bias is especially productive if it is handled scientifically. Attitudes determine the way we treat other people. Since English courses promote communication and understanding, the study of sexism, inherent in language and literature, is a vital part of the curriculum.

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